

MONODY
ON THE
DEATH
OF
ROBERT BURNS.

To which are prefixed,
OBSERVATIONS
ON HIS
CHARACTER
AND
GENIUS.

*The winter nights I've cheer'd by turns,
Wi' Ramsay, Fergusson, and Burns:
The first twa could are in their urns,
Their souls at rest:
Now weeping Caledonia mourns,
Him last and best.*

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CHARACTER
OF
ROBERT BURNS,
WITH
OBSERVATIONS ON HIS WRITINGS.

ROBERT BURNS was literally a ploughman, but neither in that state of servile dependance, or degrading ignorance, which the situation might bespeak in this country. He had the common education of a Scotch peasant, perhaps something more, and that spirit of independence, which is sometimes to be found, in a high degree, in the humblest classes of society. He had genius starting beyond the obstacles of poverty, and which would have distinguished itself in any situation.

His early days were occupied in procuring bread by the labour of his own hands, in the honourable task of cultivating the earth, but his nights were devoted to books and the muse, except when they were wasted in those haunts of village festivity, and in the indulgences of the social bowl, to which the poet was but too immoderately attached in every period of his life. He wrote not with a view to encounter the public eye, or in the hope to procure fame by his productions, but to give vent to the feelings of his own genius—to indulge the impulse of an ardent and poetical mind,

BURNS, from ambition, or from that restless activity, which is the peculiar characteristic of his countrymen, proposed to emigrate to Jamaica, in order to seek his fortune by the exertion of those talents of which he felt himself possessed. It was upon this occasion, that one of his friends suggested to him the idea of publishing his poems, in order to raise a few pounds to defray the expences of his passage. The idea was eagerly embraced. A cheap edition of his poems was first published at Kilmarnock. They were soon noticed by the gentlemen in the neighbourhood. Proofs of such uncommon genius, in a situation so humble, made the acquaintance of the author eagerly sought after.

His poems reaching Edinburgh, some extracts, and an account of the author were inserted in the periodical paper *The Lounger*, which was at that time in the course of publication. The voyage of the author was delayed in the hope that a suitable provision would be made for him by the generosity of the public. A subscription was set on foot for a new edition of his works, and was forwarded by the exertions of some of the first characters in Scotland. The subscription list contains a greater number of respectable names than almost have ever appeared to any similar production; but as the book was set at a low price, we have reason to know that the return to the author was not very considerable. BURNS was brought to Edinburgh, for a few months every where invited and caressed, and at last one of his patrons procured him the situation of an Exciseman, with an income of somewhat less than 50l. per annum. We believe, that no steps were taken to better this humble income, and he was soon disgusted with his situation. His talents were often obscured, and finally impaired by excess, and his private circumstances were embittered by pecuniary distress.

With regard to his Poems, it has been justly observed,

that, without the apologies arising from his situation in life, they are fully entitled to command our feelings, and to obtain our applause. Some of his productions, especially those of the grave style, possess a high tone of feeling, a power and energy of expression, particularly and strongly characteristic of the mind and the voice of a Poet. Of the solemn and sublime, the Poems entitled *The Vision*, *Despondency*, *The Lament*, *Winter*, a Dirge, and the *Invocation to Ruin*, afford striking examples. Of the tender and the moral, many advantageous specimens may be found, in the Elegiac Verses, intitled *Man was made to mourn*, in *The Cellar's Saturday night*, the Stanzas to a *Mouset*, and those to a *Mountain Daisy*. There is scarcely an image more truly pastoral than that of the Lark, in the second Stanza of the last mentioned Poem. It is one of those strokes that mark the pencil of the Poet, which delineates nature with the delicate colouring of beauty and of taste.

Against some passages of his Poems it has been objected, that they breathe a spirit of libertinism and irreligion. But it ought to be considered, that he attacks only the ignorance and fanaticism of the lower class of people, a fanaticism of that pernicious sort which sets *faith* in opposition to *good works*. Of religion he expresses, in several places, the justest sentiments, though he has been sometimes sufficiently open in his ridicule of hypocrisy.

Such, we believe, is the faithful portrait of a man, who in his compositions, has discovered the force of native humour, the warmth and tenderness of passion, the glowing touches of a descriptive pencil, and that honest pride and independence of soul which are often the Muses only dower.—A man who was the pupil of nature, the Poet of inspiration, and who possessed, in an extraordinary degree, the powers and the failings of genius.

MONODY.

I.

MELPOMENE, thou mournfu' muse,
Dinna to aid me now refuse,
My paper mony a tear bedews,
My heart's like lead,
Now while I write the waefu' news,
That Robin's dead.

II.

For sterling genius, blyth and free,
Fam'd Robin's match when shall we see?
Ye sons o' music rise and gie
A waefu' screed,
The pith and saul o' mirth and glee
Wi' Burns are fled.

III.

Ye lasses, gathering heather bells,
By Scotia's mosses, glens, or fells,
Ye bardies "crooning to yourfels"
By burn or brae;
Echo thro' a' her hills and dells
The sang of wae.

IV.

He sang of nature's "foggage green,"
And a' her sweets that charm our eeh;
In strains that ne'er shall fail, I ween,
Our fauls to cheer;
For in a crack they drive the spleen
Frae a' that hear.

V.

In spring, when Sol span out the day,
And Boreas' blasts were fled away,
Sax rood of ground Rab o'er could lay,
Syne on his reed,
At night untir'd fine could he play,
But ah! he's dead.

VI.

He lash'd the canting whining race,
 Wha wear an artificial face,
 Tho' blest wi' kirks, or out of place
 Rab did na care,
 Hypocrisy weel could he trace
 And ne'er did spare.

VII.

His *Ordination, Holy Fair*,
 And Priest wha like a calf did rair,
 Some thought these hurt religion fair,
 'That heav'nly maid,
 But what was wrang Rab wadna spare,
 For a' they said.

VIII.

And whan he sings the Holy Fair,
 What man of sense can ca' it mair?
 Tho' bigotry, with ideot-stare,
 Offence may tak;
 Yet pure religion when or where
 Does he attack?

IX.

Na, na, religion heav'nly fair!
 Thy dictates Rab did ay revere,
 And tho' he did na practise mair,
 Yet ah! waes me,
 Whare dwalls the man that disna err
 As well as he?

X.

He paints religion a' fae sweet,
 As true devotions fire may beet;
 But satyrizes most complete
 And fair taks aff,
 A' them that mix our heav'nly wheat
 Wi' common c'aff.

XI.

Let poor dull rhymers rack their brains,
 His native wild enchanting strains
 Shall charm a' Caledonia's fwains,
 Baith young and aul,
 While *mountain daifies* deck our plains
 They'll touch the faul.

XII.

And far awa, as weel's at hame,
 His merit shall be kend the fame;
 For time shall dry up baith the Thame
 And silver Tweed,
 Before he shall destroy the fame
 Of him now dead.

XIII.

Ambitious fools hae mony a time
 Striven to outrival Robin's rhyme;
 But *pith* was wanting—poor dull chyme
 Was a' they gied;
 Rab was the boy hit a' things prime,
 But ah! he's dead.

XIV.

Parnassus' bastards, mony a gelping,
 Hae deev'd us wi' their dinsome yelping;
 But his sweet fangs ne'er needed helping,
 To send to prent;
 For rank and file his words cam' skelping,
 Afore he kent.

XV.

Some feckless rhymers' wit's fae scarce
 They're pinch'd to screed an antrin verse;
 But Robin's fertile muse was fierce,
 And stout and baul':
 Her pithy style had power to pierce
 The very faul.

XVI.

His death wi' far mair grief we learn,
 That on reflection we discern,
 Lang might we had our fav'rite bairn,
 In health fu' sicker:
 O curse the fallows did him learn
 To toom the bicker.

XVII.

O dool! that e'er he left the plough,
 And took him to a trade was new,
 And bade sweet Temperance adieu!
 For wae to tell,
 Then up *like Wafson's cock* he flew,
 And tint himsell.

XVIII.

But let us not, as chatt'ring fools,
 Proclaim his fauts, like envy's tools
 Wha seek out darknefs just like owls,
 Dark, dark indeed;
 But a' his failings co'er wi' mools,
 Now since he's dead.

XIX.

As bright a genius death has torn,
 Frae us, as Scotia did adorn,
 Like Phœbus whan he springs at morn,
 Clear was his head;
 What news could mak' us mair forlorn,
 Than Robin's dead?

XX.

The winter nights I've cheer'd by turns,
 Wi' Ramsay, Fergusson, and Burns:
 The first twa cauld are in their urns,
 Their fauls at rest:
 Now weeping Caledonia mourns,
 Him last and best.

F I N I S.